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ALGERIA AT THE CHICAGO OPERA HOUSE

VICTOR HERBERT long ago made his reputation as a composer, and is today duly recognized as the leading American composer of light opera music. His worth was known years ago when his "Serenade" was chosen by the Bostonians as the successor of their phenomenally successful "Robin Hood," and the "Serenade" was a triumph for composer and company. Of all Herbert's works from the "Serenade" to the present day none is more worthy of praise than the musical play "Algeria" now being produced at the Chicago Opera House, under the direction of George Marion with Harry Bulger and a large company of clever singers, comedians, and dancers. The score from overture to final curtain is tuneful, bright, and consistent. Although the producers have been content to describe the work as a musical play the ensemble work in many of the choruses falls little short of grand opera. The management claims that "Algeria" has come to Chicago to stay and doubtless this claim will be made good, for nothing in light opera or musical comedy that has appeared here in years has appealed so equally well to music lovers of refined tastes and to those "who whistle as they go out" as has Herbert's catchy melodies in "Algeria."

To Vincent Bryan and Edmond Sylvester, the author of the book and lyrics, must be given due share of the credit for the success of the production. Contrary to time honored custom in comic opera, "Algeria" has a plot—one that holds the attention and interest to its consummation.

The lines are witty, and while there is little that is strikingly new, yet in the hands of such clever comedians as Bulger and Lambart they score a success which otherwise they might not attain. William Pruetie's clever impersonation of the pompous but amorous General Petitpons, Helen Noldi's pleasing voice and oriental naiveté, and Harriet Burt's charming personality, graceful dancing, and snappy work contribute in large measure to the success of the entertainment.

It is not our purpose to review in detail the musical numbers or the individual efforts of the principals. This has been well done by the local press, with enthusiasms and praise. We

do wish, however, to emphasize the artistic side of the production, which is more in the province of this magazine. Seldom does the FINE ARTS JOURNAL have the opportunity to so honestly praise the artistic efforts in a theatrical performance that it has in the present instance.

The program on the night of our visit, through some oversight, gave no synopsis of scenes, but no sooner had the curtain risen than the audience was impressed with the convincing note of truth in depicting the atmosphere and environment of life in the market place of an oasis in the Algerian desert.

Simplicity of arrangement, correctness of architectural detail, and a color scheme thoroughly in accord with the climatic conditions of this land of the Moors and Bedouins reflected careful work of the scenic artist, in marked contrast to the striving for effect so common to the usual comic opera. The property man, too, had done his part with faithful regard to correctness of detail. The pottery merchant's display of bowls, vases, etc., was an interesting collection of characteristic forms and colorings. A touch of realism was the partly woven rug in the weaving frame, in itself a simple thing, yet wonderfully effective in the general picture. The costuming, the facial make-ups, and all the accessories showed an intimate knowledge of local customs and an intelligence in their application. The thoroughness of the producer's work was shown in the drilling of the chorus and the picturesqueness of the groupings, whether in the market place of the desert country or in the regal splendor of the sultana's palace, which is the scene of Act. II.

While the setting of Act I is the more pleasing because of its unusualness and artistic merit, the lavish costuming of Act II with the satisfying blending of colors carries the interest to the end. We could perhaps criticise justly the rather incongruous dressing of the red cross nurses, and if we were to attempt to enter the field of dramatic critic we would suggest the pruning out of the rather coarse performance of the obese cook, who impersonates the sultana for a short period in the second act. It is intended burlesque of course, but it could be made less jarring.